

Review section

New Albums

The new Ashes trophy

WISHBONE ASH: "New England" (MCA MCG 3523). Andy Powell (guitars, mandolin and vocals), Laurie Wisefield (guitars and vocals), Martin Turner (bass and lead vocals), Steve Upton (drums). Recorded at Mart's Place, Laureledge, New England, during September, 1976. Vocals and re-mixes done at Criteria Studios, Miami. Produced by Ron Albert and Howard Albert.

THE SLEEVE hints at it; the music states it. "New England" is the beginning of a new era for Wishbone Ash, an album possibly more important than their previous acclaimed work, "Argus."

The attractive but simple cover depicts pioneers of a new, barren land sharpening a self-made spear, preparing for survival. So Ash, too, obviously see it as a new beginning. What's past is past and, as shown by the figure on the back of the sleeve, who stares at the mountains in the distance, Wishbone Ash want to forget it.

The popular theory is that it has taken Wishbone Ash Mark II (Laurie Wisefield took over from Ted Turner on lead guitar a couple of years ago) three albums to hit a peak similar to that of the original band when "Argus" was hailed as its climax. I can't really adhere to that deduction.

The predecessors to "Argus" ("Wishbone Ash" and "Pilgrimage") reflected that Ash were building to a definitive work. In contrast, the later albums, ("There's The Rub" and "Locked In") were on the straight road to oblivion.

"Locked In" (and, to a slightly lesser degree, "There's The Rub") portrayed a wasted and uninspired band, whereas "New England" evokes quite the opposite response. So whatever happened to Wishbone Ash to make them think so positively again has definitely happened in the latter half of this year.

Certainly, those two previous albums gave no hint of what was to come on "New England." It has all the characteristics that set the early Ash albums apart, except that there is even more attack and a lot more guts in the feel of the music.

But, as always with Ash the vocals are weak in comparison to the instrumentation. Martin Turner, despite all the help on echo from the mixing desk, is not a great vocalist and that deficiency is made all the clearer when he battles against the excellence of guitarists Andy Powell and Laurie Wisefield.

Apart from that, the weaknesses on "New England" are few. Only one track, "Lonely Island," fails to make any impact, and it's a song so laboured and tedious that I suspect the band were running out of ideas. There's also a dual guitar run on "When You Know Love," an otherwise superb and melodic tune, which is too contrived and unnatural to fit comfortably into the song's structure.

Drummer Steve Upton and Turner provide the healthy, hard-hitting rhythm foundation on which Powell and Wisefield build, and from whence they announce that Ash is still a band where guitar work is of the primary importance, an argument best supported by the raunchy and instrumental "Outward Bound," easily the best on the album.

And to the hard rock of that track, "Mother Of Pearl" and "Runaway," there's soft and sensitive melody in "(In All Of My Dreams) You Res-



ANDY POWELL (left) and LAURIE WISEFIELD of WISHBONE ASH: "New England" is the first of a new breed in Ash albums

cue Me," "Lorelei," and "When You Know Love," as well as another superlative instrumental, the Shadowesque "Candle Light." But I still don't think that this Ash has fulfilled its potential on "New England." That'll come when vocals and melodies are brought up to scratch with the instrumentation. So "New England" isn't the culmination of this line-up's other two albums. It is, as the sleeve tells us, the first of a new breed. — H.D.

LNYRD SKYNYRD: "One More From The Road" (MCA). Lynyrd Skynyrd are one those bands who, like Rory Gallagher and Dr. Feelgood, will never be able to create the same excitement in the studio that they do on stage. But their studio albums to date have stood up well against live performances and each one has bred a classic southern boogie track. Sooner or later, I suppose, it was inevitable that someone would suggest that Skynyrd's stage set should be put down on vinyl for posterity, and, to be quite honest, I wish that that bright spark had buried the idea six foot under. Skynyrd are absolutely magnificent in front of audiences, in a class of their own. The memory of Ronnie Van Zant spouting out vocals in that broad Southern accent, or guitarist Allen Collins and Gary Rossington getting down to their break sends a shiver down my spine. And, you know what, I savour that memory, it makes

me look forward to the next time I'll see them. You know what, too, I've not yet heard a "live" album that's captured the atmosphere of concert. I don't think Rory Gallagher did it, or Roxy Music, or Dr. Feelgood, or David Essex, or Peter Frampton. Now I'll have to go and add Lynyrd Skynyrd, one of my favourites, to that list. I mean, it's not because they don't play well. They play the songs really well, but the heat Skynyrd generate when they play 'em isn't there. And that's my objection. I think the studio versions of "Working For MCA," "Whiskey Rock A Roller," "Sweet Home Alabama," "Free Bird" and the others on this double album are better by far, and the only way they can be surpassed is by planting me in front of a stage as part of an audience and letting me feel and hear the charisma of Lynyrd Skynyrd. Then again, maybe I've just got a downer on live albums and maybe you enjoy them. If so, this album has all you expect to hear from Skynyrd. Go get the feel on the next tour. — H.D.

CLIMAX BLUES BAND: "Gold Plated" (RCA). It is an extraordinary fact that even the most diligent rock researcher can develop a blind spot. They get quite paranoiac about it. Take the case of Ace Smith, the well-known scribe. He was observed tuning into Capital with a high-powered trans-

soprano, brought into play. When it comes to slow, easy, rocking riffs Climax are past masters, as displayed on the work song "Chasing Change." Perhaps it's not a legit field holler, but it has some of the structure and feel of a call-and-response traditional blues, before it develops into a modern soul workout, for Colin's tenor. Dig the bass and drum teamwork, which rocks without bashing. When it comes to memorable themes, "Together And Free" is a killer, with a nice line in choppy eight-beats-to-the-bar bass guitar, behind Peter's panic stricken guitar riffs. Colin takes a singing alto sax break, before Pierre returns to wail. "Berlin Blues" gives Richard Jones space to play boogie piano, and "Couldn't Get It Right" is notable for the cool, casual approach to the beat, and sensuous lead vocals. Climax palpably get it right with this heart-warming selection which grows in stature with repeated plays. One of the highlights for me is the surging "Rollin' Home" with Peter's vocals and guitar reaching out for the sun. It has more feeling and emotion packed into three minutes than one might expect to find in a boxed set of heavy metal guff. The music business should be grateful bands like Climax are clinging to their beliefs, and making it. The public needn't worry, because they have long ago turned onto them in droves. — C.W.

JERRY BUTLER: "Make It Easy On Yourself"; **BETTY EVERETT:** "It's In His Kiss" (both DJM). First, the Jerry Butler album is a double 28 tracks — seven a side — harking way back to '59 and moving up to '65. Jerry, The Ice Man, was the first lead singer with the Impressions, pre-dating the wonderful Curtis Mayfield and the tracks pulled together here are from his days at Vee Jay — ostensibly some of his most artistically fulfilling days as a recording artist. Contemporaneously, you may've got into his latest Motown work. Sleek as it is, here's where the cold, sharp perspective of Butler's singing began. The Betty Everett set is as indispensable as Butler's. Again taken from old Vee Jay tapes, Betty's album, a 16-track single, features her best-known hit "It's In His Kiss" ("The Shoop Shoop Song") plus her inimitable version of "You're No Good" along with "Getting Mighty Crowded" (written, incidentally, by Mr. Disco '76 Van McCoy), "I Can't Hear You" right up to "Trouble Over The Weekend." The two albums are for discerning collectors only, perhaps, but that shouldn't dissuade the general collector from investigating both of these valuable LPs as fine examples of early Sixties uptown R & B. — G.B.